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MUSIC IN COLLEGES

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ALTHOUGH I never have had the pleasure and benefit of being one of a college class myself, for more than twenty years ample opportunities to observe undergraduates and their habits, mental and social or the reverse have been literally at my door.

In the simple old suburban days of my boyhood "going to college" was a phase in the development of nearly all my personal playmates. Money simplified the step even for active minds, but the lack of it was hardly a handicap. Rich people's children sometimes proved sadly human and showed intellectual or other limitations as often as the children of missionaries or carpenters. The difference between material comfort with comparative freedom from care about money and the rather narrow circumstances which obtained among most of my friends was not very great, in either social or intellectual experiences, as I recall it. In our community there were lawyers, sea-captains, merchants, missionaries, architects, teachers, all on about the same social level, and, to my boyish eyes, enviable merely because their interests were different from ours without any thought of higher or lower.

There were few musicians, painters or other artists among us excepting foreigners who usually lived in the city and only occasionally crossed our horizon. Some few people "took lessons" but the love of art and its pursuit were both wrapped in a rosy sentimental haze which clear-minded people were somewhat loathe to penetrate. There was an occasional devotee of Lowell Mason, or lover of opera, by which one meant probably *Norma* or *Semiramide*, but we had no one whose life depended from art and there was but slight opportunity for thorough education in music.

The musical awakening which began for this country about the middle of the nineteenth century, was just showing the effect of its influence in a dormant land. The World's Peace Jubilee in 1872, one of my earliest musical recollections, was a sturdy thrust into a region where as yet we had no real foothold. I know little about its artistic results, but I think an impetus may have been given thereby to the serious study of music. Many musicians were gathered together in Boston and they made much music. There was much music and therefore more musicians, for music makes musicians just as surely as the reverse is true, and the one is the only source of the other. Shortly after this time some recognition of music appears in college courses.

Mr. Arthur Foote received the degree of M.A. from Harvard in 1876 for a thesis on a general musical subject. I think this was the first time in our history that credit toward an academic degree ever was given for study in music.

In the forty years which have elapsed since then music study has become the rule rather than the exception in our colleges. The subject is a new-comer, but not the only one; for the colleges themselves have changed radically as well as superficially.

From the viewpoint of the Victorian university they have outgrown all recognizable bounds and have become eclectic to an alarming extent. New tendencies, then just beginning tentatively, have since been carried nearly to their logical conclusion, if

not in the East, certainly in some of the Western States. Technical subjects, which were rigidly excluded in the 60's and 70's, are now every-day essential. To cite extreme instances: Young people take swimming lessons at a University Summer School and get credits. I have heard of a University with more students of music than of all other subjects combined. I do not recall its name, nor do I know of its influence.

The addition of music study can therefore hardly have changed the character of college communities except for the better. A knowledge of the history and nature of the art is certainly a refining factor in the life of any student whose sympathies tend at all in that direction. It is merely another subject in which mental discipline can be acquired and a tendency toward ideal enjoyments encouraged. Granted that there is room for the study of music in our academic institutions, the question arises whether they are favorable places for young musicians to develop their latent gifts.

Three kinds of activity belong to all music-making. First, that of the composer, the original producer of music. Second, that of the performer, the reproducer—and then that of the listener, whom both the composer and the performer must move to attain the legitimate end of their efforts.

These activities may best be considered in their inverse order. Most colleges offer opportunity and incentive to gain skill in intelligent listening. The passive is the commonest form of musical enjoyment. It is indispensable—for listeners buy tickets. It can and should require intellectual effort of a high order, beside affording sensuous and emotional pleasure of the purest kind. And it is important artistically, for the audience decides ultimately whether new music shall live or die. Training young people to accept and exercise this function is one of the nearest duties an academic body should undertake in its relation to music. There are usually lectures and, far better, concerts for this purpose.

A natural reluctance is found among college authorities to give credit toward a degree for listening, however well done. The work does not lend itself to examination. Tests cannot be applied except in such a manner as might probably render all such listening irksome or distasteful, but in a general way it is recognized as beneficial.

The teaching of performers is a question of quite different character. The advisability of offering such instruction depends so largely on the situation of the college, that it is hardly profitable to generalize. In New York, Boston or Chicago practical musicians are so plentiful and æsthetic standards so high that practical music is seldom needed in colleges in or near these cities. In more ruraly situated institutions, however, the need of good methods and models may be felt acutely.

Most of what is said in this essay about listeners and composers will apply also to performers, but one point needs I think to be emphasized. Credit in a college course cannot wisely be given for work at the rudiments of music, in either composition or performance but particularly the latter, nor should such work be encouraged, except for reasons which

apply to individuals rather than classes or groups of students (I am tempted at this point to digress to the subject of music in secondary schools, but it is too large). No one ever began piano playing or violin playing at eighteen and brought it to any kind of excellence which could give more than subjective or perhaps domestic satisfaction. The beginnings for all real musicians must be in childhood. Serious students, and I can speak of no others, have to be fairly well furnished with their necessary musical tools before their time for college life is reached.

These tools are, technique, knowledge and taste: the technique of fluent expression by playing or writing—knowledge of the models given us by great composers or performers—and taste, which is a growing, changing power of selection or discrimination between better and worse in music, or at least between good and bad. All these must be achieved consciously, but used unconsciously, instinctively, perhaps empirically. Technique in particular ought to be gained in early youth before its acquisition seems unintellectual drudgery. It requires a great deal of simple muscular or mental work. Knowledge and taste can be increased by our opportunities and surroundings, but technique is usually our own affair.

A musician's knowledge must embrace not merely models of various kinds but intimate familiarity with the materials of which music is made—rhythm, melody, harmony and perhaps what is called color. Also the form in which all great music is cast, the underlying architectural design, which provides alternate stress and relaxation, as well as the interplay of mutually contrasting and completing tonalities. Counterpoint is a higher development of melody and harmony is historically a later by-product of counterpoint.

But the vital spark whereby music really lives, although contained in these more or less material things, is not necessarily there, however perfect they may be. The highest thing in great music, the spirit in which a musician's work is conceived and executed, lies above and below them and surrounds them. This spirit does not seem to lend itself readily to analysis or criticism except for philosophers or psychologists—who have not yet been helpful to musicians as far as I am aware. They have always been gleaners in the field of music. The actual remoteness of words from music is not often realized. Music can be compared to other music, but not otherwise clearly described. It is written in notes and is uttered in tones. Nothing else than these is truly illuminating.

Probably the highest good a college might do for the music of a nation would be in training a real composer. I have often wondered if this is possible. Ordinary educational machinery seems in its aims and operations better adapted to produce quantity than quality. Its workings tend toward analysis more than synthesis, to research rather than creation. The effort to provide courses in which any normal student can meet the requirements is probably useful. It meets a popular demand, no one can be blamed for it, but it follows a line of slight resistance. It is hard to believe that such a line leads upwards, except for the lowly. No one will question the value of routine work which must inevitably form the greatest part of college teaching. But there are eminent and profound specialists among the teachers, and the academic circle is now expanded

to embrace something like a department store where every ambition can be gratified. In this sense there ought to be just what a composer seeks.

No one is a real composer at the college age any more than one is a poet, a lawyer, or a painter. But the preparatory time of life is none too soon to form habits of work. Quite the contrary, it is just the psychological moment. The need for concentrated, consecutive, constructive thinking is as great in music as in law and architecture, although such thinking is often supposed to find in "inspiration" a satisfactory substitute. I know very little about inspiration, but I know absolutely that there are no substitutes for hard work, no short cuts, nor easy methods which will curtail the long journey an artist must make. Boundless, heavenly inspiration is of no use for a composer without the tools to crystallize it into notes and the skill of long practise in using such tools. No one ever yet found new beauties through ignorance, futurists to the contrary notwithstanding, and in spite of the well-known poem, the prospect of unexpectedly striking—

. . . One chord of music
Like the sound of a great Amen. . . .

must forever remain the hope of a dilettante.

Practical, reproducing musicians may follow something like research work, but composers, after they have their tools and can use them, need stimulus rather than instruction, fancies rather than facts. Their problem is to hear mentally new, beautiful music never heard before, and to put it in such shape that others can hear it physically by direct impact upon the ears and mentally through the eyes. For this a composer needs ample leisure. The work cannot be taken up and laid down in odd moments like reading or knitting or tennis. This is not a plea for periodical idleness, merely a statement that new work, good work must be prepared for, as well as written down.

No one can compose unless he wants very much to do so, nor then unless he is well-prepared, with his tools at hand and plenty of time in which to use them. Nor can one always compose, even if in the right mood and with plenty of time. But one can be regularly in a receptive attitude toward the powers which provide ideas.

The process of composing is a little like fishing in the dark. The proper place is sought, a line is thrown out and patient waiting or perhaps some alluring practice follows. Suddenly something seems to move. If young, the fisher feverishly hauls in his figurative line, and even if old, he does it quickly, with heightened pulse and temperature, cold feet and a hot forehead. Literally, he sketches or scratches on paper with as little delay as possible what he hopes will prove to be an idea. There is usually plenty of promising resistance and a gleam at the moment of capture. But he does not yet know the nature of what he has caught, unless he is very old and wise. Usually it must be laid aside for a time, sometimes a week or a month. Upon examination in the cold sober light of day it may prove useful, or it may have to be thrown again into oblivion. If it is really an idea, the time has come for industry. Fishing itself is pure pleasure, however useful, but without this regular habit nothing will come.

To describe in detail how the composer treats his idea would be needlessly technical, but he must make

sure, if he can, that it is his own, that it has not been caught before. A clever Frenchman has defined plagiarism as "a lack of skill in effacing coincidences." Even in a student the quality of originality is priceless, but it cannot be imparted, nor even cultivated except by fostering a fastidious taste. The musician may strive for it, but not too much. Rather he should seek a natural workmanlike expression of his ideas. If he has originality, it will come out. If it can be spoiled by schooling, it is not of such quality that one need lament its destruction.

All artists must pursue the same path, the one trodden by all their artistic forbears, and must learn to make work like that of their fathers before they can make anything really their own. And here a wider knowledge of great work is indispensable, but the knowledge must be a means not an end, for those who wish to create. Their eyes must be turned inward, not outward. The object and hope of their seeking is not what has been but what never was yet. Without being too finical about conventional expressions, they must find a balance between the real and the imagined, between what they know and what they hope to find. There is also another balance, between the intellectual and the emotional elements of all art work. Without emotion it is utterly dry, without intellect, utterly silly. These balances are not always near at hand in academic pursuits. Perhaps a proper regard for them cannot be taught, but it must be learned.

Too much knowledge may result in pedantry, but this is a remote danger for most undergraduates. Emotional experiences, necessary as they are, cannot be given in doses, nor can they be measured except subjectively and they ought never to be gauged in that way. Any young student who can do this is a fair object of suspicion. He is too old.

A musician gifted with creative talent must always be more or less abnormal and must always lead a life somewhat apart from his fellows, but this is a statement of fact, not a prescription or recommendation. Many important elements in college life may prove helpful and others harmful. Its gregarious character is not an unmixed advantage, for the pleasures of companionship easily become too absorbing. A combination of music and athletics can occasionally be discerned in the glee club or banjo club, but there is little of promise for either in the union. Perfect physical condition is an ideal which must sometimes be relinquished by a musician, however admirable and necessary it may be for the average human being. Art is a jealous mistress, demanding many and great sacrifices.

Heaven forbid that I should advise any one to be a musician if he can avoid it, but some cannot, and even they must live and be provided for. Heaven forbid, too, that I should recommend any college whatever to try to add musicians to its student body. They are often exceptionally uncomfortable companions, with unusual habits and necessities. My main question is, whether the prospective worker in music should seek the college as an environment during his development. The answer lies in the personality of the student.

I can recall hardly one Continental European composer who has done so, although some of the English have. In the life of an artist it is easy to carry too much luggage—to have too many interests.

Perhaps too few would be a lesser cause for apprehension. On the other hand *mens sana* and *corpus sanum* are capital bearing high interest for any one. The associations and enthusiasms of young people are immensely stimulating. Less so are the frequent demands on precious time for routine duties. Perhaps there was a greater freedom in the Victorian university.

But ancient academic conditions no longer exist in America and in the variegated activities of our colleges there is a possible place for musicians. I fear they must be prepared to lead a double life, one academic, the other artistic. The indispensable, absolute devotion to art and the just appreciation of other benefits and beauties are not wholly incompatible, although it may be hard to reconcile them. Frankly, it may cost too much [and I do not refer to money] to be a musician.

Too much may be expected of teachers. However devoted or skilful, they are human, fallible. They can guide much, drive a little, encourage and stimulate according to their lights, but the work must be done chiefly by the learners. Students as well as parents often idealize teachers, credit them with the faculty of imparting absent gifts or powers, and thus experience disappointment. Of course any teacher worth his salt welcomes eagerly the chance to use his highest efforts. But silk purses are made only out of the corresponding material and the making of leather purses, although useful, is not very interesting, nor does it call for very great subtlety.

A student of music in one of our colleges can hope to form more or less mechanically the habit of work, hard work with both mind and muscles. Mere non-intelligent industry may be an insidious form of laziness. He can expect to make acquaintance with the great masterworks which must form the basis of his taste and preferences. He can usually acquire skill in writing, practice in self-criticism and power to discern the next landmark he must pass on the road by which he pursues his career. He should expect to devote the major part of his energies to music because it is the only time of life when he can fairly hope to travel rapidly toward artistic maturity. One year at the college age is worth many after graduation. Other college requirements must be met, but they are usually so moderate that the remainder of energy ought to suffice. If it does not, some mistake has been made. I have known musicians to stand very high in their classes. Looking back over many years of college life, experience shows that the best musicians have invariably showed better general scholarship than those who were musically poorer. Fine mental texture is as needful and as profitable in music as in any other work.

I confess that I covet a college life for our great American composer when he shall appear. Also I wish him wealth and comfort, but I am far from sure that he will not fare better without all of these things. There are many young men whose minds are teeming with beautiful ideas, new to them and possibly also to us. Certainly they can and should be helped by our colleges to utter them. These among our young men are those who see visions—and they become our old men who dream dreams. A country whose higher schools abound in them is fortunate, for they shall help others more than the schools can help them, and shall give far more than they receive.

Horatio Parker